

# SHAIKH FARID IN ADI GRANTH: RELIGIOUS IDENTITY AND INTER-RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

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A disciple once brought a pair of scissors to a famous Sufi mystic and teacher, who put it away and asked for a needle instead, saying: “I am come to join not to sever.”<sup>1</sup> These profound words were uttered by the Sufi mystic known as Shaikh Farid (1173 – 1265) who acquired the popular appellation of *Shakarganj* (treasury of sugar). He is also considered to be presumably the first recorded poet in the Punjabi language. These deeply meaningful words spoken by him about binding humanity demonstrate his concerns about the strife-torn religious milieu of his times and his heart-felt aspiration to heal the situation. Varis Shah’s following verses in his famous eighteenth century romance *Hir Ranjha* illustrate not only the way Shaikh Farid’s influence was celebrated across Punjab but also the great respect attached to his personage:

Perfect scion of the family of Chisht,  
From his devotion Patan flourishes.  
When Shakarganj made this his living place  
He quite removed all sorrow from Punjab<sup>2</sup>

In the same vein, Mian Muhammad Baksh, another famous nineteenth century Punjabi poet, wrote:

First stands Shaikh Farid, the saintly Shakarganj,  
Whose every word’s a guide to truth and righteousness<sup>3</sup>

In addition to the great admiration accorded to Shaikh Farid by the Punjabi Muslim poets, he has also been deeply venerated, arguably

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<sup>1</sup> The Encyclopedia of Sikhism, “Farid, Shaikh” s.v. (Patiala: Punjabi University, 1998), 11.

<sup>2</sup> *Hir Varis Shah*, ed. M Sharif Sabir (Lahore: Varis Shah Memorial Committee, 1986), v. 5:4, 3.

<sup>3</sup> Mian Muhammad Baksh, *Saif ul Muluk*, ed. M. Sharif Sabir (Lahore: Sayyid Ajmal Husain Memorial Society: 2002), v. 9020, 487.

even more so, within the Sikh tradition. This is evident in the way the Sikh sacred scripture *Guru Granth Sahib* or *Adi Granth* has preserved, by incorporating within its text, some of the spiritual and devotional compositions of Shaikh Farid, among those by other *bhagats* (saints or devotees). Every word of the hymns recorded in *Adi Granth*, including those contributed by the Sikh Gurus as well as non-Sikh *bhagats*, enjoys equal respect and sanctity in the eyes of its followers: when these hymns are recited, the Sikh listener is expected to attend to it reverentially and not, for example, sit at a level higher than where the scripture and its enunciator are positioned. Even Farid's verses in his *bani* (compositions) calling upon man to, for instance, perform *Namaz* (the Muslim prayer) are listened to by the Sikh devotees with quiet reverence. Therefore, the inclusion of texts written by an explicitly Muslim poet, a prominent *shaikh* in the Chishti Sufi order, within the sacred scripture of Sikh tradition is a fascinating and remarkable phenomenon in the history of religious traditions in South Asia, even when Farid-bani (the chapter devoted to Farid's poetry in *Adi Granth*) collectively amounts to only around 7 pages of the *Adi Granth's* total 1430 printed pages. Farid's dual status as a Muslim Sufi poet and an *Adi Granth* *bhagat* has important implications for issues pertaining to religious identities and dialogue exploring which will be interesting as well as educative. In what ways was Farid perceived by the Sikh Gurus and what are some of the themes in Farid-bani that might have appealed to the Sikh Gurus responsible for codifying their scripture? This paper will begin with a short biographical sketch of Shaikh Farid outlining some of his prominent ideas. In order to trace the prospective grounds of Farid's appeal to the Sikh tradition, the paper will then turn to identify some of the major beliefs of Guru Nanak, the founder of what came to be known as Sikhism. It will then briefly examine the process of compilation of *Adi Granth*, the criteria used by the Gurus to draw out and select particular *bhagats'* poetry for inclusion, the ways in which Farid fell in and out of line with those criteria, and the questions raised by some scholars about the authorship of Farid-bani.

It will then examine Farid-bani and discuss some of its central ideas relevant to our discussion. More analytical focus will be placed on examining the ways in which Farid was supposedly perceived by the Sikh Gurus; this will be analyzed by closely examining the interjections and continuations, in the form of verses, inserted by Sikh Gurus within the main body of Farid's *slokas* (verses) found within the Adi Granth. In the end, the paper will attempt to investigate the ways in which these interjections can be viewed as a model for cooperative, constructive, and positive interaction between religious traditions marked by blurred boundaries, and the ways it can be seen as a case for the construction and maintenance of a religious identity.

Shaikh Farid was born in 1173 in the month of Ramadan in a town located close to Multan known as Kotheval. He was said to have been named after the well-known Sufi poet Fariduddin Attar<sup>4</sup>, and his family genealogy is traced back to Umar ibn al-Khattab, the second Caliph of the Muslims<sup>5</sup>. It is noted that Farid grew up learning Islamic mystical philosophy along with Islamic law and jurisprudence. He is also one of the prominent founding fathers of the famous Chishti Sufi order in India. He set up a Sufi centre of devotion at Hansi, in present day Haryana, but later shifted to Ajodhan, now Pakpattan in Sahiwal district of Pakistan's Punjab. Many popular anecdotes have been developed to explain the origins of his aforementioned appellation of Shakarganj. It is said that Farid's mother, in order to induce his son to pray when he was a child, would regularly place a packet of *shakar* (country sugar) as a reward under his prayer mat. One day she forgot to provide the incentive, but because of the child's piety a packet of sugar nevertheless miraculously appeared out of divine favor in its usual place, hence the appellation. However, many have traced this name to the blessing he was said to have received from his spiritual preceptor, Khwaja Qutubuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki, who in praise of the sweet nature

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<sup>4</sup> The Encyclopedia of Sikhism, "Farid, Shaikh", 13.

<sup>5</sup> M.A Macauliffe, *The Life of Shaikh Farid*, (Lahore: Artistic Printing Works, 1903), 3.

of his disciple remarked: "Thou shalt be sweet like sugar."<sup>6</sup> Under the guidance of his spiritual master, Farid continued his spiritual practices of rigorous penance and constant prayer. He greatly emphasized on poverty and subduing the needs of the body as a prerequisite for spiritual illumination, and thus he was known for his strikingly austere personality. His set of strict penitent practices famously included the *chilla-i-makus*, a form of self-punishment involving constant prayer while suspended upside down in a well, for forty days, by a rope tied to the feet. Keeping in the tradition of Chishti saints, Farid also established a *khanaqah* (hospice) where strangers would generously receive food, shelter, as well as spiritual instruction. Informing us about the Shaikh's far and wide reaching influence, Badaoni noted that devotees even from Central Asia and Afghanistan flocked to Pakpattan to learn from Shaikh Farid<sup>7</sup>. Moreover, the famous Shaikh Nizamuddin Awliya of Delhi was among the twenty *khalifas* or senior missionary-disciples that were sent out to preach Shaikh Farid's message in different parts of the country.<sup>8</sup> His message included what are commonly considered the principles of the Chishti Sufi order: Universal love and tolerance, reverence for spiritual guide, renunciation of attachment to material world and worldly powers, advocacy of *sama'a* (sacred music), consistent prayer and fasting, service to humanity and respect for other devotional traditions, and so forth. Shaikh Farid died in 1265, and it has been recorded that his last words were "*Yahayyu ya Qayyum*"<sup>9</sup> – O Ever Living, the Eternal One.

Almost two centuries after the death of Shaikh Farid, Guru Nanak was born in 1469 and would soon come to be known as the founder of Sikhism. One wonders how it so happened that Guru Nanak developed a belief system which was open to the appeal of ideas

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<sup>6</sup> The Encyclopedia of Sikhism, "Farid, Shaikh", 12.

<sup>7</sup> Abdul Qadir Badaoni, *Muntakhab-ut-Tawarikh*, 312.

<sup>8</sup> The Encyclopedia of Sikhism, "Farid, Shaikh", 12.

<sup>9</sup> Macauliffe, *The Life of Shaikh Farid*, 30.

articulated by a Punjabi Muslim Sufi poet two hundred years ago. It will shortly become clear. Guru Nanak was known to be pious and reflective even during his childhood and youth. Once around the year 1500 he was said to have mysteriously disappeared while bathing in a river; and when he emerged three days later, he uttered the following momentous words: "Since there is neither Hindu nor Muslim, whose path shall I follow? I will follow God's path. God is neither Hindu nor Muslim."<sup>10</sup> This utterance was the beginning of what would later develop as the Sikh tradition and it clearly demonstrates Guru's aversion to be categorized under the prevailing religious labels of his time. He was born into the *kshatriya* caste in Punjab which was under Muslim domination, which explains Guru Nanak's familiarity with the tenets of both the Hindu and Islamic traditions; he recognized the normative truth, nobility, and inspiration of each of these religions but felt disillusioned by the violent hostilities they appeared to have been exciting amid their followers. He was also severely critical of what he saw as the parochialism and hypocrisy of the religious leaders of both these traditions:

The *pandit* is called wise but suffers from blindness of mind.<sup>11</sup>

The *qazi* tells lies and eats filth.<sup>12</sup>

Highlighting the conciliatory and eclectic nature of the Sikh tradition, Smith notes that if the Hindu and Islamic traditions "had agreed to negotiate their differences, they could hardly have reached a more reasonable theological compromise"<sup>13</sup> than the combination of tenets upheld by Guru Nanak that later came to known as the Sikh tradition. Guru Nanak affirmed the supremacy of a single, formless, and incomprehensible God, rejected the notion of avatars (divine incarnations), caste distinctions, and images as aids to worship, while

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<sup>10</sup> Huston Smith, *The World's Religions*, (San Francisco, CA: Harper, 1991), 75.

<sup>11</sup> Cited in W. Owen Cole, *Sikhism and its Indian Context 1469-1708*, (London: Darton, Longman & Todd Ltd., 1984), 53.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>13</sup> Smith, *The World's Religions*, 76.

endorsed the doctrine of reincarnation. This set of beliefs demonstrates the influence of both Islamic and Hindu tenets on Guru Nanak's religious philosophy. His fundamental teaching was that those who wish to break free from the constant cycles of birth and death should live in constant state of consciousness of and obedience to the Creator's will (*hukm*), and remain immersed in *nam simran* or remembrance of the Divine Word. For him formal religious practices and symbols were futile because they lead to a sense of ego which according to him needed to be overcome. Nanak travelled extensively propagating his message, mostly through the medium of poetry, of oneness of reality and the consequent unity of humanity. The tenets that Sikhism stressed seem to be largely in harmony with the principles of Sufism as it was practiced in the Punjab which we saw above in the all-embracing message of Shaikh Farid. This Sufi philosophy propounded a pantheistic view of reality in which God is present in all His creation as well as in the human heart, that all creation emanates from God and seeks to reunite with him as its final end, and happiness on earth can be acquired by developing purity of heart, care for fellow beings, self-renunciation and complete trust in God. Sikhs also view union with God to be the ultimate salvation and seek Him more within the depths of their own being rather than without. Apart from God, Sikhs believe, life loses all meaning and resultantly becomes mere suffering: "What terrible separation it is to be separated from God."<sup>14</sup> Shaikh Farid's understanding of the nature of God, as illustrated in one of his *slokas*, maintains an Infinite (*apar*), Inaccessible (*agam*) and Unfathomable (*beant*), source of all love and grace; One who invariably responds to prayers and pleas.<sup>15</sup> This understanding appears to be in line with Nanak's conception of God which, to some degree, explains the inclusion of his poetry in Adi Granth on grounds of their philosophical convergence on the central concept of God among other

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<sup>14</sup> Cited in Smith, *The World's Religions*, 77.

<sup>15</sup> Guru Nanak, *Asa 1*, AG, 488.

similarities we noted above. However, world renunciation, asceticism, austerity, and penances which featured prominently in the worldview and spiritual practices of Shaikh Farid had no place in Nanak's paradigm and Sikh faith (this notion will have important implications as we shall see shortly).

Before delving into Farid's poetry and its incorporation in Adi Granth, it is important to shed some light on the brief history of this sacred scripture as relevant to our discussion. The Adi Granth was compiled in 1604, notably 65 years after Guru Nanak's death, by Guru Arjan, the fifth Guru in the line of Sikh Gurus, with the assistance of his scribe Bhai Gurdas, arguably crystallizing the Sikhs into a "textual community."<sup>16</sup> This is noted as a significant transition for the Sikh tradition from being an oral culture to the world of written culture. It is asserted that Guru Arjan utilized the material already collected by Guru Nanak and Guru Amar Das, the third Guru of the Sikhs, while making several of his own additions. He gathered the spiritual poetic expressions of the Sikh gurus as well as Hindu *bhaktas* and two Muslim saints, one of them being Shaikh Farid: "the spiritual language was common to them all. Whatever resonated philosophically and artistically with the verse of the founding Guru, Guru Arjan included it in the Granth... bringing together voices that expressed a common spiritual quest."<sup>17</sup> The supposed criteria upon satisfying which the compositions of the bhagats were included by the Gurus is generally viewed as broad and all-embracing on account of these verses being spiritually therapeutic, and all-inclusive in terms of being authored by poets coming from diverse traditions. However there are notable departures from this seemingly obvious observation: Mann terms the criterion for ascertaining the identity of those who brought the divine

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<sup>16</sup> Brian Stock, *The Implications of Literacy*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 88-240.

<sup>17</sup> Nikky-Guninder Kaur Singh, "Sikhism," *Encyclopedia of Religion*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Michigan: Gale, 2005).



message to humanity to be “restrictive.”<sup>18</sup> Justifying this remark, he holds that in order for the bhagats to be included in Adi Granth, they had to be “people who shared the Sikh monotheistic vision and an understanding of human life with its [Sikh] social and ethical obligations... only hymns conforming to the Sikh belief in the unity of God could be accepted as embodying the truth.”<sup>19</sup> It is interesting to note how the selection criteria can be viewed as broad and restrictive by different observers at the same time. Evidently, the broadness springs from the selection of themes characterized by a humanitarian attitude and a spiritually intimate relationship with God, while the restrictiveness may be seen to arise from choosing individuals upholding a very specific set of beliefs: acceptance of a Unitarian worldview, and rejection of caste distinctions, formal conventions, and superstitious practices such as magic rites.

Codification of scripture in any tradition can generally be viewed indisputably as an attempt to ‘exclusivize’ identity, but no such conclusions can be drawn about Adi Granth’s canonization in view of its diverse contributors which makes it an interestingly unique case. It is noted that the compilation of Adi Granth can be seen as a consequence of the pressures of constituency expansion and social changes faced by the successors of Guru Nanak who struggled to somehow preserve his “minimalist teaching.”<sup>20</sup> While some have viewed this preservation and compilation as an attempt to crystallize an exclusive identity, it has also been argued that Adi Granth does not contain any explicit statements about unique Sikh identity, which is why Oberoi observes that

While there is no denying the fact that the Adi Granth has become a key cultural marker of Sikh ethnicity, it would be a

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<sup>18</sup> Gurinder Singh Mann, *The Making of Sikh Scripture*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 110.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.

<sup>20</sup> Harjot Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries: Culture, Identity, and Diversity in the Sikh Tradition*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 49.

gross misinterpretation to view it in the same vein for the early seventeenth century. Its heterodox textuality and diverse contributors were far more the manifestation of a fluid identity than a signifier of exclusivity.<sup>21</sup>

In his epilogue to the Granth, Guru Arjan offers this scripture as a platter: “they who eat this, they who relish it / they are liberated.” In any case, despite containing no explicit notions of separate identity, Adi Granth refers to themes steeped in Sikh consciousness such as centrality of faith in God, emphasis on *sangat* (a body of faith practitioners) and *santokh* (contentment). As envisioned by Guru Nanak, it also espouses universal brotherhood and opposes all distinctions of caste and color. The personages and utterances of gurus is also a central theme of the scripture, and the belief in the importance of attaining the grace of true guru sounds strikingly similar to the significance of a *pir* and the master-disciple relation in the Sufi tradition. In fact, with time, even Adi Granth has come to be perceived as the physical embodiment of the Guru, hence referred to as Guru Granth Sahib.

Even when Shaikh Farid and Guru Nanak’s lifetimes were separated by centuries with evidently no overlap of years and hence the possibility of any meeting between the two, hagiographic literatures developed in the later-day one episode of which put Shaikh Farid in conversation with Guru Nanak. In this legend, Shaikh Farid bows to Guru Nanak in acknowledgement of his holiness and miraculous powers.<sup>22</sup> This appears to be an attempt made by later Sikhs, driven by impulses of modern religious exclusivism, to establish the superiority of Guru Nanak over other non-Sikh Adi Granth bhagats, as we will note below. In any case, it is believed that Shaikh Farid’s

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>22</sup> John Stratton Hawley and Mark Juergensmeyer, *Songs of the Saints of India* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 69.

ideas, that were already prevalent and highly popular in Punjab, were also appealing to Guru Nanak by virtue of them being largely in accordance with his philosophy. So, Nanak travelled to Pakpattan to meet Shaikh Brahm (d. 1552), a descendant of Shaikh Farid, and procured those texts of the Farid's poetry from him which were in their common language of Punjabi, albeit in the South-Western dialect or *Lehendi* Punjabi now renamed as *Siraeki* in Pakistan. According to Talib, Nanak had little use for Farid's compositions in Arabic and Persian because the former was "not preparing a system of theology or philosophy, but sought to bring peace to a world which was burning with suffering."<sup>23</sup> It was this collection of texts obtained by Guru Nanak which was then incorporated into the *Adi Granth* by Guru Arjan. Farid-bani consists of a total of four *sabdas* (hymns) and 112 *slokas* (couplets). Gurus Nanak, Amar Das, and Arjan appear to have meticulously studied Shaikh Farid's compositions which is evident in the way they continued the themes of or commented on some of Farid's couplets by inserting their own verses which remain in the body of Farid-bani with specific headings mentioning the name of the Guru who authored the appending remarks. These remarks illustrate the interesting issues raised in the early "Sikh-Sufi encounters"<sup>24</sup> which we will examine below.

Before moving on to examine these encounters, it is noteworthy to highlight the questions and doubts raised by historians and scholars about the authorship of Farid-bani. It has been asserted, most prominently by M.A. Macauliffe, that the verses and hymns bearing the name of Shaikh Farid in *Adi Granth* were actually composed by the aforementioned successor Shaikh Brahm (also known as Farid *sani* or Farid the Second) who used the name of the founder of

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<sup>23</sup> Gurbachan Singh Talib, *Baba Sheikh Farid Shakar-Ganj*, (New Delhi: National Book Trust, 1974), 65.

<sup>24</sup> Pashaura Singh, *The Bhagats of the Guru Granth Sahib: Sikh Self-Definition and the Bhagat Bani*, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003), 45.

his spiritual line as his “poetical nom-de-plume”.<sup>25</sup> Pashaura Singh remarks that this assertion by Macauliffe reflects an Orientalist bias of his day “that did not accept anything coming from the tradition as valid unless it could be justified through historical-critical methods.”<sup>26</sup> Dass notes that there is no way to authenticate this idea and it is likely that various “Farids” had a hand in authoring the verses attributed to Shaikh Farid, however, he notes “there is one important point that needs to be considered: the language of these songs is a very early form of Punjabi. Thus a case can be made that these songs are by Baba Farid himself, based solely on linguistic evidence.”<sup>27</sup> Noting the nature of Sufi content in Farid-bani, Shackle also observes that these compositions “may thus be said to be broadly compatible with what is known of the Chishti Shaikh Farid from the early Persian sources.”<sup>28</sup> The questions and doubts regarding authorship of Farid-bani also became more pronounced in light of the widely held observation that there had been no evidence of any collection of Punjabi verses by Shaikh Farid preserved independent of Adi Granth (this may be attributed to the overwhelming focus on Persian as a language for early Sufi records<sup>29</sup>). For example, Gurbachan Singh Talib proudly notes

It is a strange and inexplicable mystery that no other source, except for Sikhs, has cared to preserve the teachings of Shaikh Farid in his own spoken language. Even with his *gaddi* at Pakpattan in Pakistan where his descendants still hold spiritual authority and carry on his tradition of Khanaqah and Langar (Hospice-cum-prayer House and Free Kitchen) his compositions are not available. These descendants are notables of the area

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<sup>25</sup> Macauliffe, *The Life of Shaikh Farid*, 1.

<sup>26</sup> Pashaura Singh, *The Bhagats of the Guru Granth Sahib*, 45.

<sup>27</sup> Nirmal Dass, *Songs of the Saints from the Adi Granth*, Albany NY: State University of New York Press, 2000), 202.

<sup>28</sup> Christopher Shackle, “Sikh and Muslim Understandings of Baba Farid,” (Lecture, The 2008 Amrit Kaur Ahluwalia Memorial Lecture, UC Berkeley, April 19, 2008).

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

and have been for generations. Anyway, this intriguing phenomenon is at present difficult to resolve.<sup>30</sup>

However, as noted by some scholars, evidence from Khuldabad manuscript can provide new conclusions to the questions of authenticity of authorship of Farid-bani in Adi Granth. The manuscript of the *Hidayat al-qulub wa 'inayat 'ullum al-guyub* by Mir Hassan (ca. 1370) is found in the collection of Fariduddin Saleem of Khuldabad.<sup>31</sup> There is one common verse of Shaikh Farid which appears both in Adi Granth (*salok* 7) and the *Hidayat al-qulub*. Based on this finding, Carl W. Ernst persuasively argues that a corpus of Punjabi poems acknowledged to be Baba Farid's was "in circulation in the Chishti circles within a century after his death.... [this evidence] favours the strength of oral tradition of Punjabi Sufi poetry, and the continuity of the Sikh Farid material with the older poems of the Sufi tradition."<sup>32</sup> In the light of this evidence, it may be argued that the doubts regarding the authenticity of original authorship of Farid-bani can be safely laid to rest for the purposes of this paper: as suggested, "the Gurus would not have given this bani the place of honour they did, were they not convinced that it was composed by Shaikh Farid Shakarganj, the most revered Muslim Sufi of the Punjab".<sup>33</sup>

Turning to the content of Shaikh Farid's compositions in Adi Granth, it is markedly characterized by themes such as separation from Beloved, perils and attractiveness of sin, inevitability of death, and rejection of a life that is marked by indifference to God and goodness. The most prominent theme is detachment from the world and its attractions or *vairagaya* in Indian critical terminology, and *tauba* or turning away in Sufi terminology. Since Farid-bani is an assortment of individual items marked by different ideas, it would be impractical to

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<sup>30</sup> Talib, *Baba Sheikh Farid Shakar-Ganj*, 65.

<sup>31</sup> Carl W. Ernst, *Eternal Garden: Mysticism, History, and Politics at a South Asian Sufi Center*, (Albany: SUNY Press, 1992), 166-8.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> The Encyclopedia of Sikhism, "Farid, Shaikh", 13.

expect them to fit one particular systematic framework. However, it is interesting to note that the image of Shaikh Farid that emerges out of Farid-bani is that of “an ardent follower of orthodox Islam.”<sup>34</sup> This is evident in the explicitly Islamic symbols and terminology found in his compositions such as the prescription of *nivaj* (Punjabi for *Namaz*, the Muslim ritual prayer), performing *uju* (*wazu*, ablutions), going to *masit* (*masjid*, mosque), prostrating before God which illustrates the Muslim ritual act of *sujood*, idea of *dojak* (*dozakh*, hell) and so on. The emphasis on ritual and eschatology can perhaps be attributed to his training both in mystical as well as legal sciences of Islam. He also frequently invokes the Muslim names for God such as Allah, *Khuda*, *Rabb*. His exhortation to prayer is laid out in terms so strict that it becomes fascinating, at the same time baffling, to note that such verses ‘passed’ the criteria of inclusion

O prayerless cur, Farid, this is not Good for you! You have not gone to the mosque at the five times of prayer.

Wake up, Farid, perform your ablutions and say your morning prayer.

Cut off the head which does not bow before the Lord.

What is to be done to the head which does not bow before the Lord? It should be burnt under the cooking-pot in place of the firewood.<sup>35</sup>

Moreover, Farid’s admonition to humans to ponder upon the urgency of death and fear of judgment and accountability – “When God asks thee to render thy account, / What wilt thou say thy life’s doing?”<sup>36</sup> – also appears to be in resonance with his Islamic background evident in Islam’s repeated reminders about the inevitability of death, transience of every human life, the day of Judgment, and one lifetime being the one and the last chance given to each human, which contrasts sharply

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<sup>34</sup> Pashaura Singh, *The Bhagats of the Guru Granth Sahib*, 47.

<sup>35</sup> Shaikh Farid, *Saloks* 70-2, AG, 1381.

<sup>36</sup> Shaikh Farid *Sloka* 38, AG, 1379.

with the doctrine of reincarnation, the cycles of birth and death, upheld by Guru Nanak. Moreover, Farid also frequently mentions *Azrael*, the angel of death invoked mostly in Abrahamic faiths, who comes to all indiscriminately irrespective of their beauty or success: “The lovely pot is broken, its rope has frayed away / In whose house is Azrael a guest today?”<sup>37</sup> He also invoked the *pul sirat*, a precarious bridge over the fire of hell which every soul has to cross over, another important and oft-cited symbol in Islamic eschatology

Finer than a hair is that Bridge of Hell (*sirat*): did not you hear of it before? Farid, its hellish cries you can already hear: Hasten, lest you be robbed of your soul unawares!<sup>38</sup>

By repeatedly emphasizing the death-themes such as the ones mentioned above as well as those related to the ‘abode of grave’, Shaikh Farid seems to highlight the transitory character of human life and the permanence of Reality, the deep realization of which should ideally lead to detachment from the pleasures of the world and senses. In the same vein, he also employs the idea of Satan (*shaytan*) by relating its calling to the needs of the carnal self

Despite the loudest warning against evil and constant exhortations to Good, O Farid! How can they, who have been led astray by Satan, turn their mind towards God?<sup>39</sup>

It cannot be stressed enough that it is a very telling phenomenon that such compositions marked by explicitly Islamic character were preserved in Adi Granth in the same form without any alteration, redaction or selective elimination which has important implications on the issues related to religious identity as we will discuss later. Overall, whereas Farid appears to be a pious Muslim in Farid-bani conscious of the Islamic tenets and observation of Muslim rituals, he also speaks against the insincere performance of Islamic practices which are not

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<sup>37</sup> Shaikh Farid, *Sloka 68*, AG, 1380.

<sup>38</sup> Shaikh Farid, *Sloka 1*, AG, 1377.

<sup>39</sup> Shaikh Farid, *Sloka 15*, AG, 1378.

infused with spiritual meanings and thus fail to transform the character of the individual who performs them

O Farid, you have a prayer rug on your shoulder,  
A patched coat on your body:  
In your heart you carry a knife,  
But your words are sugar-sweet.  
From the outside you seem filled with light –  
But inside your heart is black as night.<sup>40</sup>

In addition to the explicitly Islamic ideas, Farid also expresses numerous themes universally found in the devotional literatures of India, such as the idea of suffering caused by separation from the Beloved, which is a salient feature of Indo-Muslim poetry, and is also very prominent in Farid-bani. Farid repeatedly expressed his deep anguish over separation (*biraha*) and intense longing for the Beloved.

I slept not with my husband last night; my body is pining away:  
Go and ask the deserted one, how does she pass her nights  
awake?<sup>41</sup>

People continually talk of the agony of the Beloved's separation  
but for me, O Love, it is the Lord of life. For, the body in which  
such agony does no spring, O Farid, is just like a cremation  
yard.<sup>42</sup>

The themes of compassionate behavior, forgiveness, and humility are also frequently invoked in Farid-bani, for example

Speak never a rude word to any one, as the True Lord abides in  
one and all: Break no heart – as every heart is a priceless  
jewel.<sup>43</sup>

Furthermore, Farid also urges to cultivate patience as a spiritual virtue  
“Make patience your bow and bow-string, and the arrow too of

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<sup>40</sup> Shaikh Farid, *Sloka 50*, AG, 1380.

<sup>41</sup> Shaikh Farid, *Sloka 30*, AG, 1379.

<sup>42</sup> Shaikh Farid, *Sloka 36*, AG, 1379.

<sup>43</sup> Shaikh Farid, *Sloka 129*, AG, 1384.



patience – God will not let it go off its mark”<sup>44</sup> His reminder that “those who forget the divine Name (*nam*) become a burden on earth”<sup>45</sup> echoes the way in which Sufi practice of repeating God’s name (*dhikr*) corresponds to the Sikh practice of remembering and recollecting the divine Name (*nam simran*). Most notably, Farid attaches an overwhelming emphasis on the practices of asceticism and renunciation of the material world, as we observed above in his spiritual training

Farid, tear thy clothes to strips; assume coarse woolen wear.

Assume whatever wear will bring near the Beloved.<sup>46</sup>

My body in penance is macerated.<sup>47</sup>

Eat your own bare dry bread and drink plain cold water. Do not tempt your mind, Farid, on seeing another’s buttered bread.<sup>48</sup>

One would assume that Gurus’ decision to include Farid’s poetry into the Granth would have as its prerequisite an absolute convergence of spiritual worldviews between them. It is evident that Gurus concur with Shaikh Farid on most views, as we noted before, such as monotheism, dissent against elite religious authority, opposition to classifying humans into various distinctions, absolute devotion to God, meditating on the name of God, compassion towards fellow beings and so on. The overall concurrence of views is evident in the silence of Sikh Gurus on most of the *slokas* of Shaikh Farid in the Farid-bani. However, it is in approximately 19 responses by Gurus interspersed between Farid’s *slokas* where one can identify those of Farid’s views which were in direct conflict with the philosophy of the Gurus; for example, one observer notes that through these remarks, “Farid’s gloomy images of lost opportunities for spiritual elevation are

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<sup>44</sup> Shaikh Farid, *Sloka 115*, AG, 1384.

<sup>45</sup> Guru Nanak, *Asa 1*, AG, 488.

<sup>46</sup> Shaikh Farid, *Sloka 103*, AG, 1383.

<sup>47</sup> Shaikh Farid, *Sloka 51*, AG, 1380.

<sup>48</sup> Shaikh Farid, *Sloka 29*, AG, 1379.

countered ... by a more calm and confident vision of life.”<sup>49</sup> It is remarkable to note that these disagreements were not sectarian in nature in that they were not triggered by Farid’s use of Islamic symbols (the verses marked by Islamic jargon receive no moderating remarks by the Gurus!) but out of a need to moderate certain devotional qualities and ascetic ideals such as strict austerity and renunciation so as to reinforce the Gurus’ faith in and hope of Divine grace. Thus, the Gurus’ responses intend to highlight “issues such as the primacy of divine grace over personal effort, the theme of asceticism, the attitude towards life, the death theme and belief in after-life”.<sup>50</sup> The whole exchange and encounter between Shaikh Farid and the Sikh Gurus within Adi Granth can be viewed as an illustration of these Sikh Gurus eagerness and intent to engage in dialogue with other belief systems in an inclusive way. In order to trace the divergences in detail, we will closely examine the entire set of Guru Nanak’s interjections and also briefly delineate a few by Guru Amar Das and Guru Arjan. The responses of Gurus to particular verses in Farid-bani are inserted right next to the verses in question in the text. We will pose them in the form of real time discourse and analyze each in turn.

**Farid:** Go and ask the abandoned wife, / how it is that she passes her  
night<sup>51</sup>

**Nanak:** Whether at her in-laws / or at her parents, / she truly belongs  
to her Husband, / who is unfathomable, unreachable. / Nanak, that  
wife is truly happy / who loves the One without cares.<sup>52</sup>

To illustrate the relationship between human soul and God, Farid employs the metaphor of an abandoned wife suffering the gloom and pangs of separation from her Husband. This seems like a love which is marked by frailty as well as a fear of rejection. For Farid, the primacy of

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<sup>49</sup>Mann, *The Making of Sikh Scripture*, 106.

<sup>50</sup> Pashaura Singh, *The Bhagats of the Guru Granth Sahib*, 55.

<sup>51</sup> Shaikh Farid, *Sloka 30*

<sup>52</sup> Guru Nanak, *Sloka 32*

human effort and vulnerability in the way of God-realization seems a more predominant idea; thus the onus of separation and the struggle to overcome it belongs with the wedded woman. Nanak appears to refute this idea by suggesting that it is the primacy of the Divine grace instead which alleviates the fear of alienation in the woman, that is, human being. Irrespective of where the woman resides, close or far from the Husband, she still belongs with the Husband and that fact alone is enough to make her happy in all circumstances. In other words, Farid's conception of love between human and Divine appears to be one-sided and unrequited whereas Nanak's avidly reciprocal. It appears that, for Nanak, the human soul belongs to God and not vice versa, and therefore it is Divine grace that leads a human to realize Union with God and not merely human struggle which seems more important for Farid. The next 'exchange' between Farid and Nanak shows a similar tension about the primacy of human struggle versus the divine element.

**Farid:** those who stay awake / and are vigilant, / obtain their reward  
from the Lord<sup>53</sup>

**Nanak:** Reward is the Master's gift; / none can prevail against Him. /  
Some, though they stay awake, get nothing at all. / Some, though  
asleep, are awakened / to receive their reward.<sup>54</sup>

In this verse, Farid emphasizes the importance of labored prayer for the purpose of gaining Divine rewards, whereas Nanak completely rejects the idea of labored prayer and night vigils by holding that God's reward is a gift which is independent of any personal human efforts and is beyond all human logic and calculation. It only depends on God's sovereign will and grace out of which, if He wishes to, He can choose to confer His blessings on someone who does not labor in His way as much. For Nanak, "the nature of grace is such that it is a matter of divine free choice which does not depend upon any kind of previous

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<sup>53</sup> Shaikh Farid, *Sloka 112*.

<sup>54</sup> Guru Nanak, *Sloka 113*.

growth in spirituality. No amount of austerity can force it out of God's hands."<sup>55</sup> However, while noting Nanak's rejection of human labor, one needs to be careful and not develop any exaggerated conclusions by assuming that all efforts even the ones in the form of good actions have no place in Nanak's view of life. He certainly proclaims: "With your own hands carve out your own destiny."<sup>56</sup> In this vein, an astute observer makes the following distinction

One has to distinguish between the aspect of human labor that is spent on the realization of the God-principle and the creative aspect of labor that is spent on changing the reality. Guru Nanak seems to be averse to the former aspect of labor which comes close to the ascetic ideals. But, by keeping open the possibility of the blessings of God even for the one who does not labor to realize the God-principle, Guru Nanak seems to accommodate the physical laborers and the working class people into the fold of the sacred realm who were kept outside of it earlier.<sup>57</sup>

Similarly, the gloomy and allegedly pessimistic tone of Farid should not lead us to assume that Farid is subscribing to an absolute despair in God's grace or envisaging a completely indifferent God. As we saw earlier, in his *Asa* hymn, Farid envisions a God as One Lord of love and grace who responds to the prayers of his devotees and is the supreme Cherisher (*parvardigar*) of the sinners.

Furthermore, as we noted earlier that world renunciation, asceticism, austerity and penances had no place in Nanak's paradigm as much they did in the worldview and practices of Shaikh Farid; this tension is also evident in the exchanges found between Farid and Nanak in the Farid-

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<sup>55</sup> Pashaura Singh, *The Bhagats of the Guru Granth Sahib*, 55.

<sup>56</sup> Guru Nanak, *Asa* 20, AG, 2.

<sup>57</sup> Terence Samuel, "Identity and Dialogue – Baba Farid and the Sikh Gurus in Sri Guru Granth Sahib." *Institute of Sikh Studies, Chandigarh*, 2009.

bani wherein Nanak appears eager to moderate the intensity of Farid's message of austerity.

**Farid:** The body blazes like an oven, / and bones burn like wood. /  
Though my feet grow tired, / I shall walk on my hands, / so I could  
meet my Beloved.<sup>58</sup>

**Nanak:** Set not your body ablaze like an oven; / do not burn your bones  
like firewood. / Why walk on your hands or feet, / for the blissful  
Beloved / is inside you.<sup>59</sup>

In the above verse, Farid stresses the hardship a human must endure in order to realize God who appears to be transcendent and distant in this verse. This hardship is reminiscent of the Sufi idea of *fana* or annihilation which entails stripping the body of its desires and hence the soul of its attachments, leading to an annihilation of ego and a subsequent *baqa* or subsistence within God. Nanak responds by highlighting the immanence of God as opposed to absolute transcendence and by downplaying the primacy of strict personal labor in view of that immanence: why suffer pain to seek God outside when he resides within you, Nanak suggests. To be clear, this exchange does not suggest that Farid rejects the immanence of God: in another *sloka*, Farid also appears to acknowledge the immanence of God: "God in the heart abides: seek Him not in lonely wastes."<sup>60</sup> So it cannot be concluded that Farid and Nanak differ on the principles of transcendence or immanence of God; they appear to be in unison in their acknowledgement of Divine immanence. It is the nature of the means used for realization of Divine that they seem to differ on. The ideals of self-torture expressed by Farid find no merit with Nanak who appears to be stressing disciplined worldliness, and self-realization, rather than punishing the body through self-mortification. Thus, it is noted that Nanak "places a positive value on the human body which

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<sup>58</sup> Shaikh Farid, *Sloka 119*.

<sup>59</sup> Guru Nanak, *Sloka 120*.

<sup>60</sup> Shaikh Farid, *Sloka 19*.

should be used as an instrument of spiritual realization and service to humankind.”<sup>61</sup>

**Farid:** What is that word, / what is that virtue, / what the mantra, / what garb should I wear / by which I may meet my Beloved?<sup>62</sup>

**Nanak:** Humility is that word, / forbearance that virtue, / a kind word that priceless mantra, / O sister, take these three as your garb / by which you may meet your beloved.<sup>63</sup>

This is an interesting exchange wherein Farid poses queries, possibly rhetorically, and Nanak takes up the opportunity to offer his ethical-spiritual approach as a response highlighting the importance of humility, forbearance and kind speech in the way of one's quest for God. Farid's queries cannot be taken to assume his lack of awareness about these virtues but, perhaps, his underlining the fact that even though he had been trained in systematic religious education, he was unable to find satisfactory answers to the basic question of the imperatives required for 'meeting' God.

The overall exchange between Nanak and Farid demonstrates a rich blend of convergence and divergence of spiritual approaches between the great spiritual masters of their respective times. One would be curious to find out, however, whether it was Nanak himself who inserted the said remarks in his collection of Farid's poetry or was the process of supplementing carried out at the discretion of the later Gurus. Pashaura Singh argues to establish Nanak's familiarity with the Farid hymn and that Nanak was the first Guru responsible for incorporating Farid-bani at a very early stage into the Sikh proto-scriptural tradition.<sup>64</sup> Mann, on the other hand, questions this assumption and suggests that the isolated verses by Guru Nanak injected in the Farid-bani may have been copied there by later Gurus as

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<sup>61</sup> Pashaura Singh, *The Bhagats of the Guru Granth Sahib*, 57.

<sup>62</sup> Shaikh Farid, *Sloka 126*.

<sup>63</sup> Guru Nanak, *Sloka 127*.

<sup>64</sup> Pashaura Singh, *The Bhagats of the Guru Granth Sahib*, 54-64.

a result of later editorial intervention.<sup>65</sup> In any case, we can identify a few *sabdas* formulated by Nanak elsewhere in Adi Granth, outside of Farid-bani, composed in the same measure and language and employing almost identical symbols and imagery as some of the hymns by Farid in Farid-bani but intended to be a 'corrective' to his ideas. For example, Shaikh Farid's famous and didactic hymn in the beginning of Farid-bani '*Bera baandh na sakion bandhan ki vela*' highlights themes such as man's neglect for spiritual life and the consequent perilous state he has landed himself into using the metaphor of a boat in a tumultuous sea<sup>66</sup>. Guru Nanak provided a sequel to this hymn employing likewise the metaphor of a boat while stressing infinite faith in God: "Equip thy boat with meditation to find smooth passage; / ... the tempest will not rise; the crossing will be without peril. / ... We are His hand-maids; He is our True Lord."<sup>67</sup> The following remark on these poems sums up the divergence between worldviews of Nanak and Farid, from a Sikh perspective

In the Guru's hymn, Farid's thought is presented in the inverted form, keeping the imagery of the original. The lake is not tempestuous; the boat is not in peril; the colours on the garments are fast, instead of the frail Kasumbha color of Farid's conception; the journey to the Beloved is fruitful; His words instead of being stern and harsh are sweet as *Amrita*. Death in Farid is terrible, external extinction; in the Guru's hymn it is only the stepping stone to abiding peace, *moksha* in the lap of the Lord.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Mann, *The Making of Sikh Scripture*, 103-109.

<sup>66</sup> Shaikh Farid, *Raga Suhi Lalit*, AG

<sup>67</sup> Guru Nanak, AG, 729.

<sup>68</sup> Gurbachan Singh Talib, *Guru Nanak – His Personality and Vision*, (Delhi: Gurdas Kapur, 1969), 59-60.

In the same vein, Pashaura Singh concludes that “on the whole, Shaikh Farid’s tone is pessimistic, whereas Guru Nanak’s is resonant with exuberance and optimism.”<sup>69</sup>

In addition to Guru Nanak’s differing remarks, we will now turn to briefly look at a few examples of interceptions composed by Guru Amar Das and Guru Arjan to identify some further trends and differences in this paradigm of historical Sikh-Sufi dialogue. The following is an ‘exchange’ between Farid and Guru Amar Das

**Farid:** O Farid, those who did not revel / when their hair was dark /  
shall not revel when their hair is white. / Love the Lord deeply / And  
your love shall be ever new.<sup>70</sup>

**Amar Das:** O Farid, whether dark-haired or white, / the Lord is  
unchanging, / if you ponder upon Him. / But this love cannot be gained,  
/ try who might. / The Lord gives His cup of love / to whomever He  
pleases.<sup>71</sup>

It is evident that the later Gurus continued to preserve the philosophical legacy of Nanak by advancing similar propositions in response to Farid’s compositions. In the above verse, Farid seems to suggest that one who does not begin to seek God in a young age cannot do so in old age. He correlates the success of God-realization with youth and seems to imply that one should ideally be initiated towards God at a tender age. Guru Amar Das refutes this assumption, again in the spirit of underlining the primacy of divine grace over human condition, and suggests that all human lifetime is conducive to the quest of realizing God. Youth may be more quick and open to formal learning because of its natural malleability but formal learning has nothing to do with spiritual quests which are experiential, informal, and arguably non-methodical in nature. By repudiating Farid’s emphasis on the ‘right age factor’, Amar Das is not only rejecting the

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<sup>69</sup> Pashaura Singh, *The Bhagats of the Guru Granth Sahib*, 64.

<sup>70</sup> Shaikh Farid, *Sloka 12*.

<sup>71</sup> Guru Amar Das, *Sloka 13*.



formalism, but he also seems to be restoring hope for those individuals past their youth: old age ought not to make one despondent deeming one's life a lost opportunity but one can turn towards God at any point and attain Him through right intentions and divine favor. Even though this emphasis on Divine favor seems to be in harmony with the teachings of Guru Nanak, Guru Amar Das' personal experience might also have contributed to this argument since he was known to have succeeded Guru Nanak at the age of seventy-two.

Guru Arjan, the fifth Guru and the one responsible for compiling Adi Granth, also inserted his own feedback into Farid-bani which is worth noting.

**Farid:** O Farid, frightening are the faces / of those who have forgotten His name. / Here on earth, they suffer black sorrow, / and up ahead they have / neither house nor home.<sup>72</sup>

**Arjan:** O Farid, the Bridegroom / is exceedingly handsome / and indebted to none. / To be arrayed with Allah's color: such is true adornment.<sup>73</sup>

O Farid, / Suffering and joy are one; / drive out sin from your heart. / What Allah ordains is good: / thus shall you find His court.<sup>74</sup>

In these verses, Farid highlights the miserable condition of those who have forgotten God's name and have consequently lost hope for salvation. Arjan's response is not marked by any stark disagreement to Farid's message but just supplements it by highlighting that the state of suffering can be overcome by eliminating sin from one's heart and obeying God. It is telling to see Arjan employ the term 'Allah' for God when responding to Farid by which he seems to be addressing Farid in his own terms. "Arrayed in Allah's color" is also an interesting phrase which alludes to the Guru's philosophy of purifying oneself through

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<sup>72</sup> Shaikh Farid, *Sloka 106*.

<sup>73</sup> Guru Arjan, *Sloka 108*.

<sup>74</sup> Guru Arjan, *Sloka 109*.

positive and spiritual sublimation and unification and not through agonizing bodily practices.

**Farid:** Farid, I thought I alone was in pain, / but actually the whole world is in pain. / I went up the roof / and looked on every house in flames<sup>75</sup>

**Arjan:** The lovely world is like a garden, Farid / in which some poison bearing plants also grow / But they for whom the Master cares do not suffer at all

How sweet is life, Farid, / with health the body blooms! / Yet those who love their dear, sweet [Lord], / are rarely ever found!<sup>76</sup>

Above is an interesting exchange, highlighting the comparative optimism of worldviews, in which Guru Arjan's attempts to moderate the presumably 'gloomy' view of life put forth by Shaikh Farid and endorses the life-affirming principles which were upheld by Guru Nanak. One observer notes this point in quite strong words: Guru Arjan took great pains to "restore social sanity to the views of Shaikh Farid where they touch borders of nihilism and total denial of life here and now."<sup>77</sup> We can see that Farid paints the entire world with the stroke of suffering and pain to which Guru Arjan responds that even though there is an inevitable element of suffering in life, it does not tarnish the entire world which is by and large beautiful, and those who are loved by God transcend all worries and pains of the world. In his second remark, one can also identify a positive value attached to a healthy body which is in direct variance with Farid's strongly held belief underlining mortification of the flesh.

After having analyzed both Farid-bani and the Gurus' remarks in it, we can now turn to analyze the prospective purposes behind the inclusion of entire bhagat bani into the Sikh scriptural text, and the

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<sup>75</sup> Shaikh Farid, *Sloka* 81.

<sup>76</sup> Guru Arjan, *Slokas* 82-3.

<sup>77</sup> Attar Singh, *Socio-cultural Impact of Islam on India*, (Chandigarh: Punjab University, 1976), 10.

aims it sought to accomplish. There is one view that argues that the presence of bhagat bani in Adi Granth illustrates the “humble submission on the part of bhagats – both Hindu and Muslim – to the superiority of the nascent Sikh tradition.”<sup>78</sup> In this context, it is presented, arguably apocryphally, that the bhagats themselves came to Guru Arjan seeking to have their compositions included in the sacred text and the Guru graced those whom he believed were worthy of that honour. Some Sikh commentators even took great pains to demonstrate that all bhagats were in fact the disciples of Nanak.<sup>79</sup> For example, mythical narratives have been conjured to describe a meeting between Guru Nanak and Shaikh Farid in the imaginary land of Asa.<sup>80</sup> However, as we have noted before, Shaikh Farid lived two centuries before Guru Nanak’s lifetime, and it was Guru Nanak who sought out the former’s compositions and procured them from his descendants because of his vast reputation. The attempts to demonstrate Sikh Gurus’ superiority over bhagats appears to be a tendency inherent in modern religious exclusivism. As noted by Christopher Shackle, even attempts to rewrite the history of Punjabi literature from a Sikh perspective have tended to confer a primal importance to Guru Nanak while giving Farid a somewhat subordinate status. This trend has been completely reversed across the post-1947 border where the Muslim understandings of the history of Punjabi literature have played up the pioneering role of Baba Farid as a poet-missionary of Islam, whereas Guru Nanak and his successors found the most marginal places<sup>81</sup>. Partisans of modern Sikhism have also tried to argue that the collation of Adi Granth by Guru Arjan was an attempt to publically declare the separation of Sikh Panth from other religious traditions, however, Oberoi views that “historically it is difficult to admit such an

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<sup>78</sup> Sarupdas Bhalla, *Mahima Prakash*, 371.

<sup>79</sup> Giani Gurdit Singh, *Giani Gurdit Singh Ji* (Amritsar: Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee, 1991).

<sup>80</sup> *Puratan Janamsakhi*, ed. Vir Singh, (Amritsar: Khalsa Samachar 1926), 86-94.

<sup>81</sup> Shackle, “Sikh and Muslim Understandings of Baba Farid”

interpretation”<sup>82</sup> because Adi Granth was a manifestation of a fluid rather than an exclusive identity. Even when Sikhs view the passages from Gurus, Sants, or Sufis in their sacred text as having scriptural authority of the Guru to provide a code of conduct to a Sikh, some have argued that status of bhagat-bani in Adi Granth is in the category of ‘not-quite full scripture.’<sup>83</sup> From a different point of view, the inclusion of bhagats’ compositions points to Sikhism being the “purified expression of Indian spirituality”<sup>84</sup> for Adi Granth attempted to include spiritual wisdom of all ages and traditions. Some scholars have attempted to show this inclusion points to a non-sectarian and spiritually egalitarian character of the early Sikh community.<sup>85</sup> In this vein, Oberoi suggests that history of Sikh tradition was radically different from other religions’ such as Christianity which from their very onset or early stages begin to demonstrate a concern with demarcating believers and nonbelievers and systematizing belief.<sup>86</sup> Mann most cogently and convincingly proposes the following as the possible motive for inclusion of bhagat-bani in Adi Granth

For a student of the history of religion, the incorporation of the hymns by prestigious non-Sikhs into the Sikh text may have resulted from the an attempt to legitimize the newly created text, and it seems logical that a nascent community would associate itself with the spiritual stalwarts of the time to gain requisite prestige and a closer identification with their followers.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries*, 54.

<sup>83</sup> Noted by Shackle, “Sikh and Muslim Understandings of Baba Farid”

<sup>84</sup> Pritam Singh, ed., *Nirmal Sampradae*, (Amritsar: Guru Nanak Dev University, 1981), 159-78

<sup>85</sup> Harnamas Udasi, *Adi Shri Guru Granth Sahib dian Puratini Biran te Vichar*, (Kapurthala: Kantesh Pharmacy, 1969), 64-6

<sup>86</sup> Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries*, 48.

<sup>87</sup> Mann, *The Making of Sikh Scripture*, 110.

It is evident that multiple explanations have been advanced to analyze the motives behind compilation of Adi Granth and the inclusion of bhagat-bani in it; clearly and inevitably, these explanations vary according to the vantage point of the observer. In any case, in light of the modern habit of viewing religions packed in watertight distinct categories marked by stark boundaries, that is 'exclusivizing' one's religious tradition at the cost of 'otherizing' those of others, the inclusion of compositions by non-Sikhs into the Sikh sacred text appears all the more remarkable a feature in the history of religions in South Asia. It is very interesting to note that the Sikh Gurus not only incorporated those texts by the bhagats which shared their spiritual worldview but they did not also shy away from including texts with which they disagreed on certain details, as we have examined earlier. However, it is commendable that the Gurus expressed their disagreement over those points by inserting their own compositions in respectful and empathetic rather than hostile or polemical terms. Also, it is interesting to note that the cause of disagreement was not sectarian in nature in that it did not arise out of the different religious denomination of the bhagats, as we have examined in the case of Farid. The Gurus had no contention against the Islamic jargon employed by Farid or his mention of explicitly Islamic beliefs and practices; but rather against some of his severe ideas about austerity and strict spiritual practices. Again, the significance of this feat cannot be stressed enough that Farid's compositions marked by explicitly Islamic character were preserved in Adi Granth in the same form without any alteration, redaction, or selective elimination.

Guru Nanak's interjections in Farid-bani demonstrate that even though he did not agree with, for instance, the Islamic belief of a single lifetime and the imminent resurrection, he did not argue with Farid over those details in order to persuade him towards the doctrines of reincarnation, samsara, or the cycles of birth and death. Instead he chose to voice his disagreement with respect to the non-doctrinal, spiritual issues of primacy of Divine grace over human effort and fear

of judgment, attitude and optimism towards human life, ideals of moderate, disciplined living over self-mortification and so forth. This pattern perfectly captures Nanak's ability to distinguish between what he believed to be the essentials of a religious tradition and what were its unimportant features. Preserving the Islamic verses in the same form illustrated the eclectic character of Sikh tradition, but at the same time, the absence of Nanak's remarks over those specific verses alluded to his belief that a spiritually devotional approach rather than a creed-driven method which will guarantee human salvation. The overall encounter of interjections demonstrates the Gurus' readiness, ability, openness to, and etiquette of dialogue beyond their own identity, and their principal-based rather than polemical criticism upon concerns they deemed crucial, and carried out that dialogue with unqualified respect. In any case, even when the verses marked by an explicitly Islamic content were not eliminated or altered rather preserved in the text, one can identify some attempts made by the Sikh Gurus to carve out a distinct identity albeit in spiritual and not sectarian terms. Thus, the inclusion of bhagat-bani points to a religious philosophy characterized by inclusiveness of multiple voices but the interceptions of gurus also attempted to maintain a distinct spiritual approach associated with the Sikh consciousness later known as Sikhism. Guru Nanak and the later Gurus were keen to articulate from the onset, for instance, that they advocate disciplined moderation and reject ascetic austerity as a means to realizing the Divine. Even when defining it in terms of spiritual principles, the Gurus had a vision whose devotional distinctness they wished to demarcate and later preserve. These arguments of the Gurus, inserted in the forms of commentary verses in Farid-bani, were crucial in shaping the emerging Sikh identity even when laid out in terms of spiritual principles, beliefs, practices, and hopefulness towards life in relation to the commonly held Sufi beliefs, so as to not become completely subsumed into them. In the contemporary times marked by grave misunderstandings and religious illiteracy, the whole exchange may provide a model for an open

dialogue and engagement between traditions appreciating their common philosophical principles, while at the same time maintaining, through civil disagreement, some semblance of a spiritual identity constituting basic principles that the respective traditions consensually deem valuable and indispensable.

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